

Is your vehicle ready for winter weather?

Preparation key to avoiding cold-weather tragedies

6th Area Support Group Safety Office Release

Winter driving can be inconvenient and annoying, but most of all it can be dangerous. However, being prepared can help minimize the special risks associated with cold-weather driving.

The following tips can help get both you and your vehicle through the snow and safely into spring:

Where the rubber meets the road

- Don't get caught unprepared by the first snowfall: Put snow tires or at least all-season tires on all four wheels. The minimum tread depth should not be less than 1/6 of an inch or 4 mm.
- Chains may be required for some alpine passes – if you are planning a winter trip, check the route to see if they will be necessary.
- Remember: in icy conditions even the best tires are of little help. In the worst winter weather, drive with extreme caution – or not at all.

See and be seen

- Check that all of your vehicle's lights are in good working order and that headlight beams are adjusted correctly.
- Clean the lights regularly. In rain, snow and slush lighting power can be reduced up to 75 percent by the accumulation of dirt and grime.
- Make sure your wiper blades are cleaning properly, with no smearing or stripes on the windshield.
- Clean both the outside and inside of the windshield. The effects of cigarette smoke and dirt particles on the inside can reduce visibility by one third.
- Be sure the windshield washer is adequately filled with freeze-resistance solution.

Emergency kits can be difference between life, death

The National Highway Transportation Safety Administration advises drivers to equip their vehicles with safety kits and note the following tips to increase the odds of surviving in case of accidents or breakdowns.

Vehicle safety kit:	Passenger safety kit:	Advice when stopped or stalled:
■ Flashlight	■ Food	■ Stay with your vehicle.
■ Jumper cables	■ Water	■ Don't overexert yourself.
■ Abrasive material (sand or kitty litter)	■ First-aid kit	■ Display bright warning devices.
■ Shovel	■ Medication	■ Be sure the exhaust pipe is clear.
■ Warning devices	■ Blankets	■ Run the car only long enough to remove the chill.
■ Snow brush and ice scraper	■ Cellular telephone	

- Before driving, ensure that all windows and lights are completely clear of snow and ice. (No "porthole driving!")
- Remove all snow from the roof of the vehicle, to prevent motorists following you from being confronted and endangered by a sudden snow flurry from your roof.

Fit to drive

- Perform a fitness assesement on your vehicle to ensure it is up to the challenges of winter driving.
- Get an engine tune up.
- Switch to winter-grade oil (if you aren't already using all-season-oil).
- Check your car's battery, ensuring that it is in good condition, its connections are good and its terminal points are not corroded.
- Use anti-freeze that is not only strong enough to prevent freezing, but fresh enough to prevent rust.
- Be sure all fluids (including oil, brake and hydraulic) are at proper levels.

Fighting the fog

- Fog can affect perception, causing the illusion that vehicles in front of you are farther away than they really are.
- As soon as you see fog, increase the distance between your vehicle and the one you are following.
- Slow down.
- Use low-beam headlights and rear fog lights.
- Turn on your wipers and defroster to remove moisture from the windshield.
- Use the right edge of the road or painted road markings as a reference – never rely on the rear lights of the vehicle in front of you.
- Turn off the car radio and open the driver's window a little to listen for other vehicles.
- If visibility is extremely limited, pull off the road, turn on your hazard flashers and wait until the weather has cleared.

Remember, the key to winter driving is that it is better to arrive late but safe, rather than not at all.